Research on Fostering Intercultural Communication Competence of Foreign Language Learners

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Abstract

Globalization has made cross-cultural communication a necessity. The mobility of people and the contact between countries have greatly increased cross-cultural communication. Intercultural awareness has become a prerequisite for successful cross-cultural communication. Intercultural awareness is required if a foreign language learner is to achieve the intercultural communication competence, which is now considered to be the major goal of foreign language learning. Intercultural communication competence is multi-dimensional in nature, implicating not only the linguistic competence, but also the power of perceiving and interpreting socio-cultural events, and the behavioral ability of coping independently with cross-cultural encounters. The objective of this paper is to present an overview of how language and culture are dealt with from a cross-cultural perspective, to discuss concerns with defining norms and standards for foreign language learning raised by this perspective, and to consider how to foster the intercultural communication competence by pedagogical approaches that integrate current understandings and researches of language, culture and learning into their curricular and instructional designs.

Key words: Intercultural awareness; Intercultural communication competence; Language and culture; Socio-cultural perspective; Curriculum design

1. INTRODUCTION TO INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Intercultural communication is a universal phenomenon. When you talk with an American teacher, or send email to a foreigner, or even when you watch a foreign film or read an English novel, you are involved in intercultural communication. The communication between and across cultures today is happening continuously at all times. So, in today's world, intercultural awareness has become a prerequisite for successful intercultural communication.

English, as an international language, has required Chinese learners' intercultural awareness. People used to take it for granted that learning the rules of English grammar and a large amount of vocabulary, besides its pronunciation, was enough in learning English. The more grammar rules and words a learner had learnt, the higher level of proficiency he had reached. However, that is often not the case. The fact is many foreign language learners, although knowing a lot about the target language, were unable to communicate appropriately and effectively in it. More often than not, being familiar with the dictionary definitions of lexical items and mastering the sentence structures don't necessarily mean the learner can apprehend the information. Between language and culture, there exists a relationship as close as flesh and blood. Language is the carrier of culture; culture is infiltrated into the language. Lack of cultural knowledge affects his comprehension negatively. Therefore, intercultural awareness is needed when a learner is to achieve the intercultural communication competence, which is now considered to be the major goal of language learning universally. Apart from language, intercultural communication focuses on social attributes, thought patterns, and the cultures of different groups of people.

2. THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERCULTURAL AWARENESS TRAINING

Intercultural awareness cannot grow naturally. It has to be trained and acquired. In native language learning, a child's acquisition of the linguistic competence (learning the language forms) goes hand in hand with the acquisition of "culture competence" (Wallace, 1988), which mutually support one another. For example, when a child growing up in the American cultural world learns the word "dog", he will normally learn the cultural meaning of the word: the dog is "man's best friend". A child brought up in the Chinese cultural world would be taught that the dog is a dangerous animal. People, who have been thus initiated into the culture in association with their native language, are naturally apt to interpret things with their own cultural preferences. This natural inclination is called "intuitive competence" (Brown, 1990). When people from different cultural background communicate, their respective "intuitive competence" may cause cultural misunderstanding. "Intuitive competence" is something that native speakers possess, but foreign learners have to be trained. Therefore, it becomes necessary for Chinese students to increase the intercultural awareness in their foreign language learning.

In an era of coexistence of multi-culture, understanding and accepting cultural differences becomes a must in order to become an effective intercultural communicator. The need for intercultural knowledge and skills that lead to intercultural communication competence becomes critical today. Cross-culturally competent persons know how to lead to a desired response in interactions, and to achieve their own communication goals by respecting and affirming the others' cultural conventions, values, mode of thinking, worldview and cultural identities. In other words, intercultural communication competence is the ability to acknowledge, respect, tolerate, and integrate cultural differences that exist between individuals, social members, ethnic groups, and countries, etc. Fostering the high tolerance of various cultural differences, and learning to deal with the cultural differences through mutual coordination, is the core of developing intercultural communication competence.

Scholars and experts have developed numerous intercultural training programs to develop intercultural awareness (Landis & Bhagat, 1996; Yum, 1989). A common goal of intercultural training is to increase people's acute awareness of cultural differences to develop their communication skills while lessoning the likelihood of misunderstanding in intercultural interactions (Seidel, 1981). Among the six most common intercultural training programs, including affective training, cognitive training, behavioral training, area simulation training, cultural awareness training, and self-awareness training, only cognitive training, cultural awareness training, and self-awareness training are directly concerned with intercultural awareness (Brislin, Landis, & Brandt, 1983; Gudykunst & Hammar, 1983; Guo-Ming Chen & Starosta, 1999).

3. DEFINING COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

The correct and appropriate use of language is closely related to society and culture. The foreigners don't make fun of our grammatical mistakes we make when we speak a foreign language. But if your choices of lexis are inappropriate in their eyes, they will be not glad, even feel angry. To British and American people, you cannot say: "You are very fat." Similarly, to a Chinese old man, you cannot say: "How old are you?" "It is that part of culture differing from person to person, from place to place that is the knowledge that will guarantee the appropriateness of language use. So we can see the importance of improving the intercultural communication competence. Before we define what intercultural communication competence is, we must first know what communicative competence is.

3.1 Communicative Competence

The concept of communicative competence was first made popular by D. Hymes (1964, 1971) in the mid-1960s as an alternative to the concept of Chomsky's linguistic competence, which first proposed by N. Chomsky (1965, 1966). According to Chomsky's theory of language, individuals are born with a universal grammar, a mental blueprint for processing and generating the appropriate language. Chomsky proposed the concept of linguistic competence to capture those sets of principles, conditions and rules for generating the structural components of a language, which any speaker of a language knows implicitly (Chomsky, 1966, p. 9).

For Hymes, Chomsky's definition of language knowledge could not account for the knowledge and skills that individuals must have to understand and produce utterances that are appropriate to the particular cultural contexts in which they occur. Drawing on rich ethnographic data on language use from a variety of social groups, Hymes called for a significantly different understanding of competence. He defined it in terms of both the knowledge and ability that individuals need to understand and use linguistic resources in ways that are structurally well formed, socially and contextually appropriate, and culturally feasible in communicative contexts.

He labeled this communicative competence and defined it in terms of four dimensions.

(1)Systemic potential: This is knowledge and ability to use the generative base of language. This dimension most directly contrasts with Chomsky's concept of linguistic competence in that Hymes considered the abstract system that Chomsky called competence as only systemic potential, a resource that is potentially but not necessarily available to individual language users (Cazden, 1996).

(2) Appropriateness: This is defined as knowledge of language behavior and its contextual features and the ability to use language appropriately.

(3) Occurrence: Which Hymes defined as knowledge of whether and to what degree is taken with language and the ability to use language to take such action.

(4) Feasibility: Which includes knowledge of whether and to what degree something is possible and the ability to be practical and feasible. Hymes' four dimensions of communicative competence can be formulated as the synthesis of 'grammatical competence', 'pragmatic competence' and 'language habits'. (Zhao and Jiang, 2003). From this, we can understand the relations between the principle of appropriateness and the communicative competence. The appropriateness of language behavior is one of the four dimensions of guaranteeing the improvement of communicative competence. It is a prerequisite for achieving the communicative competence; it is also the essential guarantee of communicative competence.

Canale and Swain (1980) were among the first to use Hymes's notion of communicative competence to design a framework for second and foreign language curriculum design and evaluation. Their initial model of communicative competence contained three components:

(1) Grammatical competence: Which is the ability to produce and understand correct syntactic, lexical, and phonological forms in a language.

(2) Sociolinguistic competence: Which addresses the extent to which utterances are produced and understood appropriately in different sociolinguistic contexts depending on contextual factors

(3) Strategic competence: Which is composed of mastery of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that may be called into action for two main reasons: (a) to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to limiting conditions in actual communication or to insufficient competence in one or more of the other areas of communication competence; and (b) to enhance the effectiveness of communication

Canale (1982) added a fourth component, that is: discourse competence: which concerns the mastery of how to combine grammatical forms with meanings to achieve a unified spoken or written text in different genres.

Canale and Swain think the four competences are relatively independent, but they are also interrelated, because they are needed in verbal communication. They are all important to communication. In comparison with Hymes, their view of communication competence seems to be more comprehensive, and more specific.

With the development of communication research, some scholars try to further refine the contents included in communication competence. Bachman (1990) divides his so-called communicative language ability into language competence, strategic competence and psycho-physiological mechanism. His language ability includes two main parts: (1) organizational competence: including grammatical competence and textual competence. (2) pragmatic competence: including illocutionary competence and sociolinguistic competence.

The notion of communicative competence helps us to see that language use involves not only knowledge and ability to use language forms, it also involves knowledge and ability to use language in ways that are socially appropriate, feasible and contextually called for, and cross-culturally acceptable.

Hymes himself may not expect that his notion of communicative competence mainly for language study provoked great repercussion and resonance. Applied linguists and language teachers are more interested in and concerned with communication competence than theoretical linguists. The notion of communication competence becomes the theoretical basis for the communicative approach to language teaching and learning in the future, which now is still popular and widely adopted. Training and developing language learners' communication competence is regarded as the primary purpose of all language teaching, which has become a common view in the world of second and foreign language teaching.

3.2 Ways of Fostering Communicative Competence

The concept of communicative competence has important implications for selection and sequencing in language teaching curricula, but there are significant limitations on the extent to which the construct can (or should) transfer from first to second or foreign language contexts, particularly because of the different relationships that hold between first and second or foreign language and culture. Within the definition of communicative competence, for instance, the context of what a speaker needs to know depends on the social context in which he or she is or will be using the language and the purposes he or she will have for doing so. From this perspective, native language norms in many cases constitute an inappropriate target for instruction, even for learners of second language who will function within the native language speech community. For what may constitute more reasonable targets of instruction, the next sections will focus on linguistic, cultural and interactional components of communication competence.

3.2.1 Linguistic Knowledge

Teaching EFL in the Chinese context traditionally targets the forms of English (phonetics, grammar and vocabulary), which a person needs to know about in his communication. "But a knowledge of the form (even when that knowledge is perfect) does not enable a person to communicate" (Li, 1987). Any language teaching should aim to help the learners acquire not only knowledge of

the form, but communication competence. The ability to discriminate between variants which carry social meaning by serving as markers of social categories and those which are socially insignificant and the knowledge of what the social meaning of a variant is in a particular situation are components of communication competence. Recognizing the patterning and significance of variation in language is of central concern to sociolinguists, since it plays such a large role in conveying social meaning. Communication competence in English is made up of three components: linguistic competence, pragmatic competence, and cognitive and affective competence. Traditional English teaching focuses only on one dimension of the communication competence, ignoring the other two. The structuralists believe that "teachers should teach the language, not about the language" (J. C. Richards & T. S. Rodgers, 1986). On the 'stimulus-response' basis, they claim that foreign language learning is a mechanical habit-formation process. By doing pattern drills and reciting dialogues, the learners are expected to minimize the chances of making mistakes so that they can form a good habit. Yet, language is not just words and grammatical rules. There is always content when people communicate. Pragmatic competence is also neglected in traditional and structuralist language teaching. Actually, this competence "enables learners to know how different communicative functions are realized in English, and who can say what to whom, how, when, why, under what circumstances and in what context" (Li, 1987). In EFL classroom of the Chinese context, teachers should help the learners to develop the communication competence from the dimensions of linguistic competence, pragmatic competence, and cognitive and affective competence. In teaching EFL in the Chinese context, teachers have the responsibility to extend learners' knowledge of English language and the English-speaking culture, particularly culturally-loaded lexical items.

3.2.2 Interactional Knowledge

The second dimension of communication competence involves interactional knowledge. Among these skills both knowledge and expectation of who may or may not speak in certain settings, to whom they may speak, when they should remain silent, how they should talk to people of different statuses and roles, what routines they should use for turn-taking in conversation, how they should ask for and give information, how they should request, how they should offer or decline assistance or cooperation, how they should give commands. In other words, interactional skills consist of social conventions which regulate the use of language and other communication devices in particular settings.

Interacting in a second or foreign language often involves the transfer of these elements from first language competence even after considerable proficiency in the target language has been acquired, as language teachers have long recognized. The English speaker learning Chinese may respond to a compliment with *xie-xie* (*thank you*) instead of the appropriate *nail, nali* (*where, where*), for instance, and the native Chinese speaker may respond 'Where, Where' to a compliment in English. Similarly, there are reports by Americans that soon after meeting a Chinese speaker at a cocktail party they may be asked, "How much money do you make?"

Such phenomena suggest that when we leave the surface of linguistic structures in language teaching and approach the deeper levels of communication competence which interaction skills appear to develop, we need to be sensitive to the socio-cultural, as well as the sociolinguistic factors that might be involved. These factors add very important considerations to issues of what should be taught in a second language curriculum.

3.2.3. Cultural Knowledge

The concept of communicative competence requires reference to the notion of cultural competence, or the total set of knowledge and skills which speakers bring into an interactional situation. Although many linguists do research on the field from different points of view, they all agree that cultural competence is an important part of communication competence in addition to some basic language skills, such as listening, speaking, reading and writing. As defined by such anthropologists as Geertz (1973) and Douglas (1970), cultures are systems of symbols, and language is only one of the symbolic systems in this network. This definition entails that understanding the meaning of linguistic behavior requires knowing the cultural meaning in which it is embedded.

English, as an international language, plays an important role in intercultural communication. Teaching English as a foreign language in the Chinese context should not only include the forms of the language but its social functions as well. "Each utterance is an act serving the direct aim of binding hearer to speaker by a tie of some social sentiment or other" (Malinowski, 1923). So EFL teachers have the responsibility to help students learn about the differences between Chinese culture and Western culture, and different speech act sets in two cultures. Teaching EFL in the Chinese context should be a course with its objective of developing students' communication competence rather than their formal knowledge of English. To our delight, speech acts theory has been applied in EFL classroom, and more and more teachers adopt communicative approach in their teaching. Some excellent textbooks with student-oriented objective have been proved effective in the development of students' communication competence. Students are taught to be aware of both appropriateness and effectiveness in their use of the target language. This is a great leap forward in foreign language teaching.

4. CONCEPTUALIZING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE

The notion of intercultural communication competence was made popular by Byram (1997) and his colleagues (Byram and Zarate, 1997; Byram and Flemming, 1998). In order to capture some of the knowledge and skills that users of more than one language develop, Byram (1997) proposed the concept of intercultural communication competence. He defined it as the knowledge, skills and abilities to participate in activities where the target language is the primary communicative code and in situations where it is the common code for those with different preferred languages.

Intercultural communication competence is made up of three interrelated components: intercultural sensitivity, intercultural awareness, and intercultural adroitness (Chen & Starosta, 1996).

(1) **Intercultural sensitivity**: is the affective aspect of intercultural competence, and refers to the development of being ready to understand and appreciate cultural differences in intercultural communication. It can be assessed through the following aspects: self-concept, open-mindedness, attitude of neutrality, and self-possession in social contacts.

(2) **Intercultural awareness**: is the cognitive aspect of intercultural communication competence that refers to the understanding of cultural conventions that affect thinking and behavior. It mainly covers two aspects of self-awareness and cultural awareness.

(3) **Intercultural adroitness**: is the behavioral aspect of intercultural communication competence that stresses these skills that are needed for us to act effectively in intercultural interactions. It mainly includes the transmission of messages, self-expression, behavioral flexibility, interaction management, and social skills.

Various publications list necessary competencies for intercultural communication. Twelve affective, behavioral and cognitive competencies have been identified:

(1) Self-awareness. Is conscious about one's self (the way one looks) and about one's reputation elsewhere.

(2) Appropriateness. Has knowledge of the socially appropriate communicative behavior.

(3) Self-confidence. Holds a realistic and positive confidence in one's own judgments, abilities and powers.

(4) Effectiveness. Is able to bring about an effect.

(5) Motivation for success. Has a strong orientation towards pragmatism and useful action.

(6) Changing perspectives. Tries to understand actions and reactions of others from their point of view.

(7) Empathy. Shows interest in others and shares emotions.

(8) Open-mindedness. Is open towards new ideas and experiences; functions effectively with people of other world views.

(9) Communication ability. Fully appreciates what others are saying and thinks consequentially prior to answering.

(10) Tolerance. Is free from stubbornness and prejudices, accepts and advocates diversity.

(11) Sensitivity. Is sensitive to the importance of differences and to the point of view of other people.

(12) Flexibility. Having a type of mental elasticity allowing to be part of and yet apart from another circumstance.

5. STRATEGIES TO FOSTER INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE (ICC)

Kim (1991) thinks that the ICC refers to the comprehensive ability that one possesses to cope with the difficulties peculiar to intercultural communication, viz. cultural differences, strange cultures and the attitudes between different cultures. Samovar and Porter (2001:277) think the people who have the ICC must have the initiative, the rich knowledge about other cultures and certain communication competence. Then how can one improve his or her ICC? Here are some suggestions on how to improve the ICC.

5.1 Knowing Yourself

As the saying goes, "Know the other and know yourself, and you can fight a hundred battles with no danger of defeat." Although the idea of knowing yourself is common, it is nevertheless crucial to improving intercultural communication competence. Because "you" are one side of the intercultural communication, your manifestation will have a direct effect on the success or failure of intercultural communication. So whether or not you know yourself is crucial to intercultural communication.

First, know your culture. Human beings are products of culture and culture helps control communication. Stewart and Bennett (1991:175) made a similar observation when they wrote: "An awareness of American culture along with examples of contrasting cultures contributes to the individual's understanding of her-or himself as a cultural being." Second, know your attitudes and opinions. All human beings are sensitive animals. Your likes, dislikes, prejudices, discrimination and degrees of personal ethnocentrism etc. all can be transmitted to the other side through your words and actions unconsciously. If you have enough knowledge about your attitudes and opinions, you can find their influence on intercultural communication as well as the problems and difficulties they cause for intercultural communication. Third, know your own communication style. The third is somewhat more difficult than simply identifying your prejudices and predispositions. If you perceive yourself in one way, and the people with whom you communicate perceive

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you in another way, serious problems can arise. If, for instance, you see yourself as patient and calm, but you appear rushed and anxious, you will have a hard time understanding why people respond to you as they do.

5.2 Disclosing Yourself

Disclosing yourself is through methods of exchange and introduction, etc. to let other side know yourself, your own culture and both sides' cultural differences. For instance, take out your photographs of daily life to let foreign guests to look in order to let them know your familiar living surroundings, climates, etc. A lot of contradictions and conflicts are usually caused by not knowing one another. For example, when some overseas Chinese students live in the local house, if you have some special requests, you may politely tell them some of your taboos and hope they are accustomed to your certain habits. The host or hostess generally may understand you and try their best to satisfy your requests. But if you don't tell them, they possibly don't know. The unnecessary misunderstanding is likely to arise.

5.3 Increasing Cultural Awareness

Globalization demands the enhancement of intercultural communication among people from diverse cultures in order for us to survive in the 21st century. As a component of intercultural communication competence, intercultural awareness is an indispensable element for us to reach this global mindset. Sue *et al* identified 4 awareness competencies (Brislin, 1983). (1) Self-awareness. It requires people to become aware of the way their own lives have been shaped by the culture into which they were born. This is also be accompanied by learning to respect and become sensitive to culturally different others. (2) Consciousness of One's Values and Biases and Their Effects. It requires conscious awareness of one's own values and biases and how they affect the way one interacts with culturally different people. (3) Necessity of Becoming Comfortable with Differences. People should not be afraid of recognizing and admittingthere are differences. They should feel comfortable with the awareness that they may not be able to behave according to these other values. (4) Sensitivity to Circumstances. Being sensitive to circumstances implies that human beings are not always reliable and that there may be certain cultural groups in which some people have a very hard time interacting.

5.4 Obtaining Cultural Knowledge

Knowledge refers to the cognitive information you need to have about the people, the context, and the norms of appropriateness that run in a specific culture. Without such knowledge, it is likely that you will not interpret correctly the meanings of other people's messages, nor will you be able to choose behaviors that are appropriate and that allow you to achieve your objectives. Knowledge here refers to both culture-general and culture-specific knowledge. The former refers to the theories or themes that are commonly encountered in intercultural interactions regardless of the cultures involved. It furnishes insight into the intercultural communication process and can therefore be a very powerful tool in making sense of cultural practices. The latter refers to customs, etiquettes, and rules that are specific to the various cultures. Such information is used to understand a particular culture.

5.5 Mastering Communication Skills

Skills refer to how well the behaviors that are regarded as appropriate and effective are actually performed. Understanding the theories and concepts in intercultural communication does not necessarily lead to culturally sensitive behaviors. People who are knowledgeable about intercultural issues are not necessarily competent communicators until they have practiced the appropriate skills. Skills can also be divided into culture-general and culture-specific skills. Culture-general skills, such as the ability to tolerate ambiguity, manage stress, establish realistic expectations, and demonstrate flexibility and empathy are helpful tools in all types of intercultural adjustment. Culture-specific skills cover a large area, which can be trained and developed through your everyday lives and business practices.

5.6 Enhancing Motivation

Motivation includes the overall set of emotional associations that people have as they communicate inter-culturally. Human emotional reactions include feelings and intentions. The former refers to the emotional or affective states that you experience when communicating with someone from a different culture. Feelings involve your general sensitivity to other cultures and your attitudes to the specific culture. The latter refers to the goals, objectives, and desires that focus and guide your choices in a particular intercultural interaction. If your intentions are positive, accurate, and reciprocated by the people with whom you are interacting, your intercultural competences will likely be enhanced.

In short, intercultural communication competence requires sufficient awareness, knowledge, motivation, and skills. Each of these components alone is not sufficient to achieve intercultural communication competence. They are interplayed to play a role in various social interactions.

6. APPROACHES TO DEVELOPING THE ICC

Aside with the good structure of language knowledge, successful understanding and communication also depends much on the cultural factors and related knowledge of cultural background implied in the language structure, which play an assignable role. Therefore, in the whole process of teaching English language, how to let

students know, identify, adapt to the cultural differences of communication between English and Chinese to foster their social and cultural awareness, has become a problem that demands our serious concern and prompt solution. We can embark on the problem from the following aspects.

6.1 Making Further Clear of Objectives of College English

According to "College English Curriculum Requirements (2007)", the objective of College English is to develop students' ability to use English in a well-rounded way, especially in listening and speaking, so that in their future studies and careers as well as social interactions they will be able to communicate effectively, and at the same time enhance their ability t to study independently and improve their general cultural awareness so as to meet the needs of China's social development and international exchanges. This syllabus especially emphasizes the development of English language learners' communication competence in social interactions. Their communication competence can contain six main factors, that is, listening, speaking, reading, writing, translation and socio-cultural competence. The socio-cultural competence refers to the ability to communicate successfully with people from another culture.

6.2 Redesigning Curriculum and Textbooks

Currently, foreign language teaching in our country is in the stage of getting rid of the old and bringing forth the new. Some schools have abandoned the old textbooks, which only contain the basic linguistic knowledge. They have begun to use some new textbooks that contain not only language knowledge but also some social and cultural contents, which stress the communication value of language and socio-cultural meanings, some "authentic materials in real life", touching upon the cultural differences of communication. Some textbooks on intercultural communication have been published.

6.3 Changing Attitudes Towards Foreign Language Teaching

First of all, foreign language teachers need to handle properly the relationship between exam-oriented education and quality-oriented education. The later stresses the development of abilities of using foreign language to communicate and interact successfully in intercultural communication settings. We should fully understand the requirements of college foreign language teaching, and make clear that we are bringing up people who need to have interdisciplinary talents. So in teaching practice, we not only emphasize teaching the basic knowledge of foreign language, but we should pay more attention to the development of foreign language learners' pragmatic competence. Second, foreign language teachers must strive to improve the cultural attainment of their own continuously. The background knowledge about culture covers a lot of grounds. It may involve politics, economy,

history, geography, arts, religion, conventions, etiquettes, values, worldview, ethics, morals, mentality, etc. of the target language country. All of them may reflect a lot of cultural background knowledge. We can try to learn the foreign culture through various channels, such as making more new foreign friends, reading extensively all kinds of literary works, watching some wonderful foreign films, listening to some elegant songs and music of foreign language. As a foreign language teacher, only if he or she persists in studying continuously to improve his or her own cultural attainment, he or she can teach a foreign language well and full of life, not only give him or her fish, but more importantly, teach him or her how to fish.

6.4 Learning About Foreign Language

In foreign language learning, in order to overcome cultural barriers, foreign language learners must, first, let themselves become interested in appreciating the culture of target language and correcting their attitude towards the culture of target language. It is difficult to imagine that a person who despises the culture of the target language can learn it well. Second, a foreign language learner must read books extensively to know foreign cultures as much as possible. This is a substantial stage to take in foreign cultures, such as the target language country's economic situations, political structure, social life, history and geography, science and technology, local traditions and conventions, literature and religion and development of the language itself. If we really want to learn a foreign language very well, we must be well equipped with this kind of knowledge. The main means to obtain this knowledge is to read extensively, other means including many media such as newspapers and magazines, broadcasting and television programs, video tapes, etc. Finally, to communicate successfully with people from different cultural backgrounds demands that foreign language learners must be good at observation and listen to advice with an open mind. Although there are many ways of observation, whichever way you may use, you must base yourself on objectively observing the differences and similarities between different cultures, thereby finding out people's differences in social attitudes and social behaviors. But only being good at observation is not sufficient. So as foreign language learners, when you meet with some cultural problems, and you can not understand them by your own knowledge, you have to seek advice with an open mind from other people, thereby eliminating various barriers in foreign language learning.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, successful intercultural communication requires much enthusiasm and a willingness to overcome cultural barriers. It is a two-way process. The ways different cultures approach communication is one of the most important things to take into consideration when

planning a collaborative effort that bridges multiple cultures. This cross-cultural collaboration is becoming more widespread as the dawn of the Internet Age brings the world closer and closer.

Rapid globalization and constant change in this interconnected world no longer allow people to continue with the tradition of doing activities or business within their own ethnic community. Our world is marked by accelerating change and greater diversity. Thus job competency alone does not guarantee success. Today's awareness of cultural differences in customs, behavior and values can be managed only through effective and initiative cross-cultural communication and interaction.

One of the main characteristics of intercultural communication is the extensiveness of its scope, that is, its complexity. Various factors involved lies at different levels, which interact and condition each other, forming a very complicated system of knowledge and skills. So achieving the intercultural communication competence is unavoidably very difficult. Another characteristic of ICC is the relativity of its appropriateness. In fact, ICC is relative, not absolute. The appropriateness of intercultural communication depends on the cooperativeness of all participants in communication. For even for the same communicative purposes, the language users employ different language forms and modes of expression, the corresponding communicative effects will be produced, which shows the different levels of ICC of language users. However, the high level of ICC of language users can be, should be attained if they always bear the awareness of intercultural communication in mind, and if they are willing to enlarge communication, extend encounters, practice positively and learn knowledge on their own initiative. In view of the complexity of intercultural communication, our every effort may be only a post station to the mysterious journey. More persuasive and reasonable theories are still left for scholars and researchers to create through persistent efforts.

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